Kepes/Lynch coll. Courtesy of the Rotch Visual Coll., M.I.T.

T H R E S H

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Art and Public Space: Questions of Democracy
by Rosalyn Deutsche

Over the last few years, the art world has shown a new sensitivity to issues of the public. Repeatedly, we hear expressions of desire for a host of objects to which the word public is attached public art, public space public intellectuals, the public sphere. And everyone agrees that public space implying openness, accessibility, and inclusion, cannot be separated from democratic ideals. Yet like democracy, the public is a contested and fragmented idea which, championed by all, belongs intrinsically to no single perspective or group.

Interest in the problem of what it means for art, or anything else to be public is one of our present historical conditions. At times, however it seems to indicate a state of regression as across the full spectrum of conventional political opinion invocations of the public are steeped in a vocabulary of nostalgia, loss and return. Neoconservatives, liberals and traditional leftists alike lament the decline of public space or celebrate its restoration. True critical voices in the art world have adopted such lost-and-found scenarios largely to dispute neoconservative appropriations of "the public." In the 1980s attention to discourses about the public stemmed in part from a desire to intervene in the economic privatization of art or to counteract a new public art industry flourishing as an arm of urban redevelopment. Against the depoliticization of art's 'public function' as the decoration or design of state- or corporate-controlled urban plazas, critics defined public art as work that helps produce a public sphere a discursive arena of political debate which may in principle be critical of the state. The public was equated with politicization itself. Yet critical redefinitions of the public, often sharing the form of conservative concepts harbor their own authoritarianism Critics extol the virtues of a singular public sphere endowed with an originary plenitude that, fragmented by heterogeneity and particularity must be regained. Through the notion of a foundation—in universal reason or an essential political struggle—the public sphere becomes a field of escape from difference to a sovereign space a privileged location of politics outside public debate.

But the popularity of the public theme testifies to another aspect of our historical condition—the emergence of new political identities and a new concern for rights and democracy. New social movements, political theories and cultural practices nurture an idea of public space conceived outside the framework of a return to the past, one that cannot be lost or found since, incomplete by definition, it is always in gestation. Indeed, the public has taken the shape of what Bruce Robbins calls a 'phantom.' For whom, Robbins asks, were earlier public spheres ever accessible? 'Where were the workers, the women, the lesbians, the gay men, the African-Americans?' The public is a phantom then because the very quality that makes it public—its inclusiveness—has always been illusory. The public spaces of the past have really been the possessions of particular social groups. Further, the public is a phantom because the very ideal of universality is exclusionary, a fiction constructed by expelling difference and particularity as merely private. Yet advocates conclude that a public sphere is necessary to democracy and some foster a realization of the public by pluralizing or multiplying the concept the public sphere would no longer be so elusive if all issues were potentially admissible within it and if a multiplicity of publics replaced a singular one.

In my view, however, the public can only be a phantom precisely because a substantial identity would convert it into private property French political philosopher, Claude Lefort, contends that the space of debate about political questions is constituted only when with the democratic revolution, power no longer justifies itself by reference to an external presence but emanates instead from a source within society—'the people' who themselves have no absolute definition. It is then from a negativity that the public space comes into being the relational space where the social is constructed. What is recognized in the public space is the legitimacy of debate. The public sphere is political, democratic and a phantom for the same reason social meaning emerges and is put at risk only in a public space. Public space is crucial to democracy not despite but because of its phantom status attempts to give it a substantial meaning close it down. We observe this closure when protectors of lost publics speak in the name of any number of foundations of public coherence. God an objective moral order historical necessity aesthetic quality the people's interest—the basic conditions of artistic meaning. In the interest of extending public space, we should consider the place from which the subjects of these statements claim to speak? Is it a public space? ∎

Projection (hands, tank, miners) on Ouke of York Column, Waterloo Palace, London

● Suggested reading about public space
● Rosalyn Deutsche Uneven Development Public Art in New York City October 47 (Winter 1988) 3-52
● Met in Space Artforum (February 1990) 21 23
● Claude Lefort The Question of Democracy and Human Rights and the Welfare State in Democracy and Political Theory Minneapolis University of Minnesota Press 1988
● Bruce Robbins Introduction The Public as Phantom in Robbins ed The Phantom Public Sphere Minneapolis University of Minnesota Press 1993

**Plaza at Corbusier's
Secretariate Complex,
Chandigarh, India.**

**Nek Chand's Rock
Garden, Chandigarh,
India.**

L.Vale
L.Vale

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- Newly released *Lawrence J. Vale's Architecture, Power, and National Identity,* (Yale University Press, 1992). Vale explores parliamentary complexes in capital cities on six continents, showing how the buildings housing national government institutions are products of the political and cultural balance of power within pluralist societies. Vale argues that the manipulation of environmental meaning is an important force in urban development.

- Julian Beinart is the organizer and chairman of an international conference on the subject of the public building in Jerusalem this November. James Stirling, Herman Hertzberger, Rafael Moneo, Aldo Giurgola, Harry Cobb and others will present case studies with Stanford Anderson, Kenneth Frampton and Joseph Rykwert as interlocutors and critics.

- Michael Dennis is the author of *Court and Garden,* (MIT Press 1990). He studies the evolution of modern conception of space that explores the social, psychological and especially the formal transformations that led architects to trade "the city of public space for a city of private icons."

Consider the assumptions that underlie the problem formulation and method of a current urban design studio generated for S M Arch S students (also open to level three M Arch students.) The studio set at Carnegie Mellon University explores the physical fabric of traditional European cities in order to illustrate high density "urbane" solutions for a large institutional client. On the other hand, the Fore River Shipyard Reuse workshop looks for profitable market driven programs that resolve the conflicting aspirations of its actors. At some level each studio grapples with what the agenda of urban design might be in the definition of the public realm.

Julian Beinart, Michael Dennis, and Larry Vale reflect on the

Space for Public Place-making...
By Pratap Talwar

"I am a Statist," remarks Julian while endorsing the role of public authority in the creation of public space. In private life, he argues, we have obligations only to home and family, in public, however we must behave in relation to others, foreigners and strangers. "A public space is good when we are made secure in the random ritual of otherness." The public interest could therefore be served variously from prescription, regulation and operation on one extreme, to the empowerment of prevailing social institutions and practices on the other. In all cases, public space itself is essentially programmed, with a conscious formal intent, even though the uses that inhabit these spaces may be ephemeral or permanent. In a similar vein, Michael Dennis agrees that contemporary urbanism must be a self conscious activity because the lack of consensus on civic responsibility has obscured understanding of public values and conventions. The "embarrassing" degradation of public institutions such as the postal service result in the "cheap laminate paneling of lofty ideals of democracy." Literally. Both Michael and Julian agree that architecture and urban design can be pro-active realizations of normative values which the State is obliged to make.

On the other hand, Larry Vale feels that one of the central tensions in making public spaces today arises from the disjuncture between the ideas of the designer and the political realities of the place. More often than not, he feels, architects and urban designers assume a society that is far more open than a fearful political and business leadership would ever allow. "An extreme case is Chandigarh, where the vast Corbusian plazas designed for public assembly stand empty and the buildings stand guarded. By contrast, just a short way beyond the reach of the official public space, the unofficial public space of Nek Chand's multi-acre fantasy Rock Garden attracts a steady stream of visitors, who seem quite willing to pay for the opportunity. This example of a privately-created place that serves the public well seems less of an anomaly than one might think. A similar spirit pervades the tri-continental reach of Disney and the ubiquity of the American festival marketplace."

Michael believes that privatization and the concentration of wealth (since the 18th century), has relieved the "aristocracy" from the onus of making privately funded public gestures to the "patrimonia". In contrast, Larry feels that such rationalization only serves to idealize a "presumed 'golden age' of public contact." He believes that public spaces have always been exclusionary and continue to be controlled by more surreptitious means. Even Nek Chand's wondrous garden, Larry asserts, is beyond the reach of those without the means - oblivious to those who lack the spare rupee to gain entrance. He feels that if designers wish to care about the social quality of new public spaces, they must design them in places that are actual or potential hubs of pedestrian movement (though such decisions are usually beyond their control).

Michael feels that the modernist tendency to subvert hierarchical order in the name of a "democratic plan," has only resulted in an autonomous building type that completely disregards its context. "Architecture cannot be an indulgent private act, and must be understood as a fragment of a larger reality." He advocates the redefinition of building types, that by expressing the discontinuities between the public and the private, acknowledge the duality of each urban artifact.

Julian extends the discussion by distinguishing between "publicness" promoted by actual use, and a virtual appropriation of artifacts (be it open space or buildings). He feels that public space has less to do with ownership, and more to do with its ability to evoke "collective experiences." He feels that Rossi, by so strongly arguing the primacy of form over function or institution, misses the opportunity of harnessing all of these in the making of public building. Nevertheless, Julian agrees with Rossi's concerns for memory, that is, for public architecture that "both comforts and is familiar, as well as challenges and educates." This separation of perception and production reopens an opportunity for the design of privately sponsored public space. Larry reflects that the appropriation of famous public spaces from Paris to St. Petersburg to Beijing happens "not because of the public spiritedness of architects and their patrons, but because of political change."
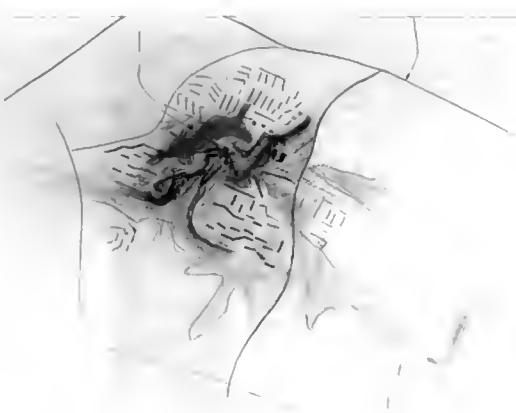
In the final analysis, the debate draws its line at whether a normative theory for the physical design of the public realm is useful. The argument is about what is possible and what should happen. One wonders how these issues will play out in the design studios ∎

Barren Urbanity: Transition and Superimposition

Thesis by Polly McKiernan

Through this thesis I have attempted to reinforce my initial observations for the potential of superimposing a new density within an existing cooperative of high rise slabs. In Lublin, a need was expressed by the people of Lublin for a city center to support the 50,000 residents within this cooperative. I have chosen to incorporate and intertwine the existing landforms within the existing built landscape. Throughout Eastern Europe development is inevitable and some serious discussion needs to become commonplace

Editorial

The responses that the theme "MIT and the City" generates are diverse, from theoretical debate, both outside (Rosalyn Deutsche) and inside (the Environmental Design interviews) the architectural discipline to design questions and propositions through exhibitions, studios and other researches. These accounts are indicative of the tension between the nature of various school-wide activities. This issue illustrates that they all engage in different facets of a larger public space discourse, investigating its social, political, and formal implications. It is therefore crucial to nurture these seemingly discordant views, as the potential of their interaction can be fertile.

We are happy to publish a response to last issue's theme on representation by Irene Fatsea. We hope this is the beginning of a tradition where exchange of ideas takes place on these pages.

Themes for Thresholds were chosen so far with the intention of provoking vital exchange of views on issues with which the school is presently preoccupied. The themes therefore are means to invite wide and varied participation, rather than to limit or prescribe it. We hope that these initial issues will encourage our readers to voice their opinions and create new directions of debate. We would especially like to draw attention to and to call for contributions for two in school debates that Thresholds will engage in the fall: the form, goals, and future roles within the school of the Design for Islamic Societies program, and the Visual Arts program.

This is the last issue of this semester. Thresholds will reappear on a monthly basis next fall. We have enjoyed working with our contributors and advisors and thank them for their thoughtful and enthusiastic involvement, especially Pratap Talwar, our theme advisor for this issue.

Have a safe exam week, and a great summer!

the editors

M Wade Stevens

"Thinking the City": Two Views

I n the fall semester, 1991, with the impetus provided by Jan Wampler, the design studio faculty met to discuss the idea of mounting an exhibition. The display of existing work was dismissed while time was insufficient for the coordination of a collaborative effort around a single idea. Finally a challenge to make individual contributions to a common theme was accepted.

The theme of the exhibition offered each faculty member personal exploration. Using the city as a base found common agreement, thus the theme "Thinking the City" was set. The Boston framework was used both as texture to work within and as a way of geographically locating each person's interests. The exhibit was conceived as a short sketch problem in which the faculty would present some thoughts about design in the Boston context as a vehicle for the exploration of the city more generally. We present here two responses to the exhibition by students of the department.

Thinking the Design Agenda for the Nineties

By Samuel Isenstadt & Imran Ahmed

"Thinking the City: Twelve Views from MIT" can be understood as the first attempt by members of the Department of Architecture to define the agenda for architectural investigations at MIT for the next few years. The exhibition is thus a map that locates a set of issues, various positions within those issues and that traces connections between the teaching of architecture, our understanding of the city and our eventual intervention in the city. And, as a map, the distance between positions is significant, differences in position produce a constellation of issues that obviate the need for thematic unity. In this way, the depth of thought in some of the projects can begin to illuminate the shortcomings of others. While these relations between installations are not exactly precise, neither are they indeterminate. These paragraphs attempt to chart one such configuration.

The two poles of Maurice Smith's and Shayne O'Neil's work question the reciprocal roles of structure and infrastructure. In Smith's piece, a structure presents itself as a field of propensities, a system that suggests further developments but doesn't insist upon them, providing a plan for growth that, at the risk of its own subversion, falls short of dogma. An initial structural logic, a wooden frame guides its own subsequent articulation as new elements, such as windows, seem to evolve out of the density of the structure itself. Any particular element seems to vacillate between a figural autonomy and its share in the logic of the larger whole. In this sense, Smith's architectural installation becomes most provocative as an urban analogy: as a rigid structure with a significant ability to frame and guide additions to its own fabric. At the same level of abstraction, it can also be seen as a lens through which the rest of the urban attitudes represented in the exhibition can be appreciated, both literally and figuratively. Its vacillation in scale between architecture and urban analog is the key to its significance: the literal and figurative rigidity of the structure is precisely what sustains the moments of particularity. The meaning of those moments and their possibility of formation is totally integral with the formal matrix in which they find themselves. The simultaneous contrast between the piece's reading as urban analog and as an emblematic house frame also integrates the project with MIT's long-standing concern for housing as the fabric of the city.

Smith's structural tectonics touches upon O'Neil's tectonics of infrastructure, again, at a conceptual level and by the formal similarities of their super-

Pardon Our Appearance, Exhibit in Progress

By Joel Gwynn

T he faculty's failure to provide criteria for self-evaluation in the exhibit "Thinking the City: Twelve Views from MIT" is disillusioning. The opportunity to make a coherent and accessible statement about architecture was missed.

The exhibits seem to fall into three categories: Design Projects, Formal Structure Investigation, and Iconographic Treatment.

The first of the Design Projects one encounters in the show, and the most clear of any of the exhibits, is Frank Miller's "Design Scores" exercise for Harvard Bridge. He describes a design method consisting of directional optional decision branchings within a set of parts. He then chooses a problem, and solves it using this method and Autodesk CAD tools. The advantage of his use of Autodesk is that design steps are explicit and rigorous—you can't fudge to a LISP compiler. The disadvantage of relying too heavily on the computer, as Frank does in this case, is a resulting sterility of form. Using a cube as an ordering device for formal variations is a good strategy for organizing Autocad models, but has limited use outside that environment. So, we gain an understanding of some issues which arise in the use of today's most sophisticated media.

Maurice Smith's installation is a copious description of his ongoing (and old) endeavors in the habitable screen world with theoretical writing, instances, and projects. One of the most imposing of the exhibits, it successfully addresses the exhibit space itself by building the passageway through the room.

Fernando Domeyko's "Train Station in Friburg, 'Connecting Differences'" the most imposing exhibit, blocks the passageway which Maurice seeks to build—a strange way to connect differences. It is difficult to see any relationship between the model stand, a good Scarpa-esque cast connection atop an inexplicable pair of steel skis, and the bland white model it showcases. Any model would do.

Shun Kanda's "Urban Masts at the River Crossing" is as discrete an object as the project itself. While the choice of the windswept tree-sail form is an appropriate beginning for a project on the Charles River, the work itself is too diagrammatic to educate us about a design process.

Imre Halasz's "St. Botolph St. Urban Design Initiative" is a frustrating exhibit because the information is obscured by the display. In an

The Sigus Poland Housing Initiatives
By Reinhard Goethert and Jack Myer

SIGUS became involved in Poland in January 1991, starting with a joint seminar and workshop attended by international housing experts, government officials, and students from Oxford Polytechnic (England), Warsaw Polytechnic and MIT. Subsequently, a SIGUS workshop was held in April in Boston with students and faculty from Poland and England, exploring experiences of Boston public housing rehabilitation and their potential lessons in Poland. In the summer, a student team drawn from throughout the School was sent to Poland to research development processes and the construction industry, and to lead a participatory planning approach with a group of tenants in a large housing cooperative. Most recently, during Spring break, SIGUS organized student-led research teams to return to Poland to focus on research of informal markets and pre-war housing as models, and to continue participatory planning. Since then, the effort has been given a substantial boost with the awarding of a USAID technical assistance contract, which will allow continued research efforts over the next three years.

The Poland Housing Initiatives focus on housing and related development issues arising out of the transition to a market driven economy. Particular interest is on the massive housing estates built after WWII which house approximately 70% of the population. These complexes of anonymous, outdated slab construction are products of forty five years of centrally planned, highly controlled environment, and most agree that this planning approach is obsolete.

What the model for the new Poland will be remains an open question. Residues of the past still remain, but it is unclear whether it will be a re-awakening of the past or the invention of a new future. Since January 1990 the imposition of a market system has proceeded painfully. The existing housing stock is deteriorated and over crowded, and their are massive deficits variously estimated at between 1.4 and 6 million units.

The SIGUS initiatives in Poland provide a challenging contrast to its traditional Third World housing focus. In the Third World, housing problems are coupled with meager resources in all areas, education, health, economic, technical, and administrative. Dealing effectively with these problems has largely defied traditional approaches and international development agencies have pulled away from direct confrontation with the problem and shifted to a macro-economy focus. In the East Bloc countries we see very high skill levels, almost universal literacy, a relatively good infrastructure, an administrative structure in place (although needing to change), but also with a situation of limited financial resources and an unclear future where (in effect) the future needs to be re-defined.

In these initiatives we have adopted (although some say that they have adopted us) a city (Lublin) and a 50,000-person housing cooperative (the LSM Housing Estate) built under central planning. These areas typify the challenges facing the former East Bloc countries. They provide us with a manageable research frame outside of the continual political struggles in the capital and other key cities. From this base, students are given the opportunity to confront some of the key challenges in the world today.

Several underlying questions have driven our involvement:

• What will be the form-response of future housing throughout the East Bloc? The 1945-1990 period in Poland's history is often cited as a past to be forgotten, a period of bad memories. Does this imply that pre-war models be adopted without question in an attempt to eradicate all vestiges of centralized planning and control? Or will a new form evolve from both pre-war as well as from central planning approaches?

• How can the potentially negative impacts of the transition to a market economy in housing be minimized? With a new market, the immediate effect is that unsubsidized rents will rise. Will people be driven out, and where will they go? Can ways be devised to cope with these immediate effects until employment and incomes catch-up?

• How can people gain control and have a say over what happens in their environment, particularly in the replanning and new construction? Under the centralized planning system, decisions originated in Warsaw and were passed down without question and implemented. This led to a generally docile acceptance and any attempts by communities to gain control were seen as confrontational. How can a sense of control be rebuilt?

• How should previously planned commercial areas be handled under the new market-orientation? What would be the physical frame for leveraging private investment in partnership with public authorities? What regulatory framework needs to be in place to allow the market mechanisms to work? What will be the appropriate urban forms for the centers, since the previously designed solutions are no longer appropriate? A level II studio under Jack Myer tackled these issues.

• Are western aid agencies and outside developers the only source of funds for new developments? Must the country wait until all of the necessary legal revisions are established? An alternative way to initiate development may be to turn the development pyramid upside down, instead of starting at the small apex with heavy outside funds, reversing the pyramid mobilized small amounts from many sources.

• Is the western market based model the right choice? Or would this be an opportunity for approaches which mitigate the worst aspects of free-market which yields both winners and losers? Perhaps there is for a variation of the Swedish housing approach, British Council Housing, land trusts, or even the Hong Kong development oriented system?

• As outsiders, how can we contribute? Are we just raising false expectations among our counterparts? Or are we assisting in more subtle ways which are difficult to quantify but provide needed support, perhaps some ideas, and in a few cases make outright contributions?

• And last, where do we go from here? We have completed an initial round of investigation, research, and have recommendations in mind, do we continue, and if so how and in what direction, or is it time to depart? ∎

Tenure in Transition: Case of the LSM Cooperative Housing Estate, Lublin, Poland
thesis by Sanjay M. Kumar

In this thesis, various development models are considered as end state scenarios which become means to explore different tenure options. The implication of these various scenarios indicates that there is no single model that can be applied uniformly. Transference of models does not ensure their success. The ultimate choice needs to be made by the LSM community, and the identified models modified to adapt to the local conditions.

Participation in Post-Socialist Housing: Thesis on the Lublin Housing Cooperative
thesis by Daniel Benjamin Abramson

This thesis explores how design can assist discussions about appropriate regulation and public investment in Poland, where both housing and capital are in short supply. In particular, critical issues of density and the configuration of public and private space and amenities are approached in a way that is comprehensible to a wide range of participants in the planning process, commensurate with the broad democratic reforms recently adopted in Eastern Europe.

Changing Neighborhoods

Zana Street Commercial Area

(More) On Representation
By Irene Fatsea

During periods of rapid change and development architecture intensifies its relationship with texts Architects become readers and readers become architects ("The Vanity of Architecture Topical Thinking and the Practice of Discontinuity, Via no 8 1986 p 54)

These words by Donald Kunze and Wesley Wei are intended to mark the character of every new era of cultural crisis in history. Through their suggestive use of the chiastic schema, the two authors indicate that the arts should not remain within the accepted boundaries of their medium but open to each other's possibilities through a relationship of unrestricted exchange—an exchange which does not necessarily entail subordination of one art to another but a free trading on the level of their essential means of signification. Thus apparently incommensurable entities, instead of surrendering to ossified forms of representation, become subject to the creative influence that only novel forms of interaction can generate

The theory that explain this exchange originates with Giambattista Vico, an eighteenth century Neapolitan philosopher who happened to develop his ideas at a historical moment of cultural crisis. His famous motto 'verum ipsum factum', due to its witty reversibility embraces the spirit of exchange as it suggests that the intelligible resides only in what man makes and vice versa. Born eighteen years after Descartes's death, Vico confronted a situation in which thought was moving away from its traditional role as an instrument of argumentative reasoning based on rhetorical devices toward a more logical and empirical domain. In this domain, the 'real' value of things was primarily measured against the objectivizing categories of reason. What was left out, i.e., the 'non-objective', became synonymous with irrationality, privacy, arbitrariness,

or mere taste. Claude Perrault's division of beauty in architecture into 'positive' and 'arbitrary'—the former founded in the objective language of mathematics and the latter in the ever-changing people's taste, succinctly exemplifies this dichotomy (Ordonnance des Cinq Espèces de Colonne, 1683). The human body, while serving for centuries as the main source for the interpretation of the physical pre-Cartesian world through its direct association with the imagistic qualities of objects, gradually saw its role changing into the very object of analytical/scientific research. Modern scientists, in an effort of gaining unmediated access to the world's hidden facets, defiled the sacrality of its surface through a process of methodical dissection. What remained invisible for centuries and was commonly understood in terms of tactile signs, with the advent of Modernity, gained value primarily through its visual-rational manifestation

Vico characterizes the passage of modern civilized societies into this new system of signification as a passage from imaginative into intelligible universals. According to Vico, human history begins with imaginative universals which formally make their appearance in the construction of myths. Myth is a way of "thinking through things". It is a way of comprehending the complex relationships of worldly phenomena on the basis of familiar and emotionally loaded images generated by the beholder's imagination in his/her effort of gaining a permanent grasp of any lost, not yet accessible desirable, or simply absent object of experience. Thinking through things implies no hierarchy among different levels of thought (i.e. concrete–abstract) because imagistic constructs are founded on the world of things and tend to convey the meaning of specific objects only with reference to the particular historical moment of their formation. Thus imaginative universals i.e., the conceptual counterparts of experience, are tightly related to a concrete beginning as they have roots in the set of conditions which a particular time and situation necessitated. Images, that is, the intermediaries between particulars (i e, concrete objects) and universals (i e, the equivalent of concepts), act as the agents which safeguard the particularized

memory of an event by taking full advantage of the expressive energies of the world of things. They are bodily constructs as they are generated by the body's imaginary projection upon the world. Until a sensational grasp of the world is established, understanding in the form of coming to terms with this world cannot be attained. The human body serves as the qualitative measure par excellence in this process of decipherment.

Architecture, from its beginnings, has been one of the principal ways of fixing memories. Images exist in both building and its representation in paper. They help in organizing the material of architecture by bringing order and regularity to it in the same way that they bring order and regularity to an argumentative speech or to any other form of human activity With reference to the exemplary case of architectural drawings of Carlo Scarpa, Marco Frascari observes:

The lines, the marks on the paper, are the transformation from one system of representation to another They are a transformation of appropriate signs with a view to the predictive of certain architectural events, that is, on the one hand the phenomena of construction and the transformation by the builders, and on the other hand, the phenomena of construing and the transformation by the possible users. ["The Tell-the-Tale Detail", Via, no. 7, 1984, p. 30)

By the same token, the imaginative semiotic function of the architectural object is meant to direct human thought to two distinct directions, one related to its process of making and another related to its purposefulness. Both directions have reference to a concrete narrative whose essential components are to be found in the building's details

With the passage of humanity into its modern phase, rational categories of thinking and institutionalized conventions set up the scene for a new vision of reality. Intelligible universals, as opposed to imaginative resist the participation of images in the memorial function of architecture and, along with it, the corporeal nature of edifices. Versatile dissection fails to create the proper distance between the building and its representation—it can not show the building as an absent object, that is, an object belonging to memory. Architecture has severed itself from its mythical role, that is, its ability to tell a story

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A Kerr

Hacienda Buena Vista, a 17th century coffee plantation.

A Kerr

A public square in a town in the mountains.

An Exchange with Puerto Rico, *By the Frozen Space Workshop*

Jan Wampler's Spring 1992 workshop concentrated on an approach to design which reverses the usual way of building in an urban setting, rather than considering the built form as a singular object in space. Wampler's workshop focuses on the space in between built form, or "frozen space." The medium for the exploration has been colored transparent plexiglas which is used to model the spaces in between the built form. Thus, the models become a reversed image of the typical way we represent space or form—the space is built, the form is void

The workshop moved to Puerto Rico and worked on a site in Santurce, an urban area just outside San Juan. The area is predominantly low-rise residential with a linear commercial strip. The area presents a unique character with extremes of scale and texture including a mixture of small-scale squatter shacks, middle-class residential, and multi-family residential and commercial high-rises

Architecture students from the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) approached the same site from a more conventional urban design perspective, and both MIT and UPR students developed separate proposals for the redevelopment of the area. In mid-April, the Puerto Rican students and faculty visited Boston and a great deal of discussion was generated when the two groups presented their proposals for review. The workshop's premise of constructing unbuilt space as a prelude to designing architectural form differed from the Puerto Ricans' emphasis on defining built form that adhered to a more strict interpretation of Santurce's new zoning regulations Such discussions provoked lingering questions about the nature of working outside of one's own cultural and educational context

One of the most immediate questions concerns the nature of the background that one brings to the problem. In Boston, the workshop analyzed patterns of public and private space and local variations of zoning in Beacon Hill, Charlestown, Back Bay, and Cambridge. In what way is this study applicable in different environment/culture like Santurce? The workshop attempted to use these studies not as a prototype for Santurce, but instead applied them as methods for studying the site, which led to positive discoveries about spaces between. We found the uses of different references between the groups became complicated, the differences were not just

cultural. The Puerto Ricans (working at a different scale) seemed to draw upon European examples Furthermore, it is difficult to determine differences of opinion among the visiting students, and between students and faculty. Certainly from our perspective some of their basic assumptions seemed on the whole to be initially limiting

Another question that arose was how much rigor is required to understand the culture that one will be working with? What should the methods of inquiry be, and how does one evaluate the accuracy of this understanding? Without conducting a formal study of traditional old Colonial San Juan the workshop focused its attention on areas of Puerto Rico from mountain haciendas to traditional public plazas, that had special qualities unique to the island. Our understanding and application of these associations often felt tenuous But maybe this tenuous feeling is a positive impetus for design

Finally, how does the interaction process work between visitors and local architects? Can outsiders perceive patterns and attributes which are so ingrained and familiar within the education and culture that they have become invisible to the local eye? Our design and approach offered them a different vision for the site. Basing our design on what we observed, drawing on the unique character of Santurce and the special qualities found in traditional public places, we suggested an alternative that we thought maximized the potential of the present character and fabric of the area. While their understanding of materials, typologies and design components created an extremely different design, we hopefully informed each other by solving these problems in different ways. While in Boston, one of the Puerto Rican students commented that the bare trees had a wonderful lacy quality. We hope that we offered the same fresh input to Santurce

The questions raised do not have ready answers However, struggling with issues that would otherwise not have been raised is a very enriching experience. Without visiting this unfamiliar and exciting site without working with other students and being in another culture the greater implications of the space between would have been lost ●

instead, it "superintends the construction of containers for the documents that represent the memory of a civilization: the library, the archive, the museum" (U. Eco, "Architecture and Memory", Via, no. 8, 1986, p. 89). In this context, the human body, being treated as one more object of scientific curiosity by modern industry, informs architectural production with the standards of its arithmetic properties. Iconic metaphors with reference to the body are either non-existent or too obvious to justify a poetic intention. ■

Literary sources that could further clarify the ideas presented in this text are: G. Vico, The New Science of Giambattista Vico, Ithaca, N.Y., 1984; F.A. Yates, The Art of Memory, Chicago, Ill., 1966; H. Bergson, Matter and Memory, New York, 1991 (orig. 1896); M.-M Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, London, 1962 (orig. 1945) Also all the literature of Prof. Marco Frascari. ■

CALENDAR

- **5 May, Tuesday**
  Architecture Department Party
  Bldg. 9-150, 6:30 pm

- **10 May, Sunday**
  Barbecue Lunch, Farewell Party
  for S M Arch S Class of '92
  to be announced

- **11 May, Monday**
  Last day of classes, following
  Tuesdays schedule

- **12 May, Tuesday**
  S M Arch.S Thesis Presenta-
  tions and, 9 am -5:00 pm
  N51, 3rd floor

- **15-16 May**
  Symposium on Pre-Modern
  Islamic Palaces, Gund Hall, 48
  Quincy Street, Cam 9 am-5:30
  pm

  *M Arch thesis celebration
  to be announced*

Final Design Studio Final Reviews

- **14 May, Thursday**
  AM   Duke Reiter
  PM   Renee Chow

- **15 May, Friday**
  AM   Michael Dennis
  PM   Imre Halasz

- **18 May, Monday**
  AM   Jan Wampler
  PM   Shayne O'Neil
         Maurice Smith

- **19 May, Tuesday**
  PM   Jack Meyer

- **20 May, Wednesday**
  AM   Undergraduate, 4 04
  PM   Undergraduate, 4 01

MIT St. Petersburg Project
by Mark Dinaburg

Since August 1991, a group from the School of Architecture and Planning has pursued a range of projects in St. Petersburg, Russia. The primary work has been a collaboration with a large St. Petersburg state planning institute, Lengiprogor, on a major revision of the city's Master Plan. As an attempted planning response to increasingly fundamental changes in their city, the newly-elected non-Communist mayor and council announced a Master Plan competition, to run from October 1991 to April 1992. Plans for a number of related projects, such as planning for new port facilities and re-use of the existing port/waterfront, mid-density row housing in a new residential district and detailed study perhaps leading to production of a "Nolli map" of the city's historic core.

What value might this work have for the School?

First, at the simplest level, St. Petersburg is one of Europe's great cities—the Venice of the North—which is only now once again open to study and cooperation from the West. Attention to its monuments, spaces, and planning principles as well as to the tasks of modern redevelopment which can build on historic accomplishments, can be of intrinsic interest to members of the field.

Second, our school is concerned with proposing and testing models of development. St. Petersburg is the most European of Russia's cities and thus it may well be the most open to western forms of organization and action and to cooperation with our practitioners and investors.

Finally, influence of idea and example can also flow from Russia to the West. Too often, our presumption is that the fall of the Communist regime also refutes 70 years of urban design history, and that they need to adopt as quickly as possible, "our" solutions. Practical engagement with Russian counterparts can begin to show us which of our solutions are in fact translatable and valuable for them, and, indeed, what might be the limitations of value for us of our conventional frames of references ■

(PARDON APPEARANCE, cont.)
effort to layer the plan of Boston is hidden, in an effort to color code, the accompanying images are obscured by plexiglas. Also the urban design issues are not clearly defined.

The first exhibit encountered in the *Formal Investigation* category is Renee Chow's "Sustaining the Individual in the City," a straightforward definition and illustration of some urban housing issues. Renee's is the most clear of any in this category. We come away with an enhanced understanding of social potential inherent in formal organizations. The model, however, looks unfinished, and could use some of the color found in Jan Wampler's model, which could use less.

Vagueness plagues both Jan Wampler's definition of "Space Between" and his modeling method. Picturesque images from historical Boston are captioned with fuzzy 60's idealism: "Cooperatives might form as residents become more connected by the space between." Sure. Which configurations lead to this? Why? There is potential in the "frozen space" modeling method which is not exploited in this instance. Because we don't know what the heights of the plexi blocks represent (when is it intensity of use and when is it the height of the space?) and because at that scale the Back Bay is just extruded solids, there is no information in the model that could not be better represented in a drawing.

Shayne O'Neil takes the "space between" behavior one step further. Where Jan purports to understand space between as a designed thing, Shayne isolates it as a discrete object, in the same way that most buildings are discrete objects. The disturbing result is that less sophisticated viewers look through the peephole into an apparent vaginal orifice. This may be an accurate characterization of an alley, but not a useful one.

Tom Chastain's attempt to find a generative vocabulary of urban definitions is good, but lacks commitment. What do the colors of the drawings and the modeling materials mean? In order to believe the case for familiar elements acting in a new way we must see an explicit diagram of how they do. Then we need to see why this new understanding is better than the old. The exhibit acts spatially, but occupies what might have been the only breathing space in the room.

In the *Iconographic* category, Jack and Margaret Myer's "Thoughts on Urban Continuity" is entertaining but nongenerative. Placing us in an evolutionary continuum, from Hunting/Gathering to Agricultural to Industrial to Post-Industrial phases, and explaining the corresponding effect on architecture is good grist for the mill, but what we need today are projections for a better Post Industrial world and for a future Information world. If we are to learn anything useful from the Prague example, we need to understand which physical configurations allow for attachments, and how much of this is due to the particular culture. Finally, there is no sense in which the installation itself is an opportunity for attachment; it does not lend itself to repeated readings. Bill Hubbard's exhibit provides a good soundtrack.

The most upsetting of the exhibits is Wellington Reiter's "Taking the Measure of the City." The method of distilling five framing devices from Imperial Rome (all variations on a single phallic form)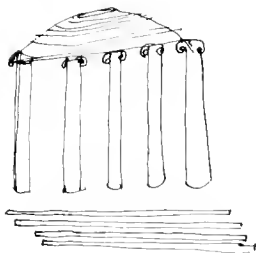 as the primary elements to organize the city contradicts the general belief in the continuity of form, light, and territorial control implicit in other exhibits. The projections are bleak and ominous, unless one can muster a cynical chuckle at the image of a virtual condom on the Bunker Hill monument. The drawing style suggest process, but in fact it is scribble on a carefully planned drawing.

One comes away with an immense "Why?" What has been learned? Or is the point just to get it all out there -twelve seemingly autonomous statements in a show subtitled "Resisting Autonomy?" One needn't be an alarmist to be alarmed by this. ■

(DESIGN AGENDA, cont.)
structures. O'Neil's piece likewise vacillates in scale. Founded upon the vibrant discovery of an urban space previously unseen by either the pedestrian or the conventions of property ownership that direct the pedestrian's walk, O'Neil attempts to incorporate this residual space by giving it an architectural figure. At the same time, however, that the detritus of urban mapping exercises is bound to the built environment, access to its interior is limited to a particularly distorted view that crowns an awkward moment for the observer's body. The space of O'Neil's discovery excludes all but one visual sliver. O'Neil seems to be simultaneously commenting on the distortions and awkwardness of land distribution as well as the inevitable disappointment of architecture that attends to the purely visual. The richness of his commentary is generated from a vacillation in scale similar to that which animates Smith's work.

The simultaneous engagement and conflict of these two works can also become a model for understanding the exhibition as a whole. Thus, one of the values of the exhibition can further be seen in its ability to generate discussion that connects kinds of architectural production, whether drawn, written or built, with the city and its citizenry. The fertility of the ensuing debate is therefore the measure of the exhibition's success. While the present discussion considers only one structure of issues that arises between two of the installations, the following years of studio investigations will consider more. ■